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Tuckahoes[1]

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INTRODUCTION: The term tuckahoe was used in early literature to describe generic edible roots of higher plants; later to describe sclerotial bodies of fungus origin (Weber 1929). Presently, the term is used to describe sclerotia of the fungus *Wolfiporia cocos* (F. A. Wolf) Ryvarden & R. L. Gilbertson (Gilbertson and Ryvarden 1987). The spelling has many variations, ranging from "tawko" to "tockouhoughe" (Weber 1929).

HOSTS: *Wolfiporia* is a pathogen on many conifer and hardwood species (Farr et al. 1989), causing a cubical root and butt rot of mature and old-growth trees, and a decay of dead trees. It is a serious problem on stored *Populus* pulpwood in the Northeast. The sclerotia *[Sclerotium cocos* Schwein.: Fr. (anamorph)] or tuckahoes develop from mycelial growth within tree roots. They are found at varying depths underground. Tuckahoes have been associated with the following hosts in Florida: *Citrus, Diospyros, Eucalyptus, Magnolia, Pinus, Poncirus, Quercus, Rhus, Sabal,* and *Zea* (Alfieri *et al.* 1993).

Fig. 1. A tuckahoe; a sclerotium of the fungus *Wolfiporia cocos* from pine roots. Approximate length = 6 in. Photography credit: T. S. Schubert.

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DESCRIPTION: Tuckahoes vary in shape and size, but are generally oblong to globose, ranging from acorn to volleyball size. The exterior is wrinkled, fibrous, and brownish-black; tough and flexible when fresh and hard when dry. The interior of a tuckahoe is white to pinkish, spongy and pliable when fresh; becoming hard when dry (Weber 1929) (Fig. 1). They are edible, barely palatable, and of low nutritional value. Native Americans reportedly used them for food.

DETECTION: The remains of sporophores resembling *Wolfiporia* are sometimes found on the outer coat of the sclerotia; however, fresh fruiting structures of *Wolfiporia* are commonly observed on dead trees, not in association with tuckahoes. Sporophores (basidiocarps) are annual. They occur at first in circular patches on the bark, then spread widely on the surface. The spore surface is light tan with 1-2 pores per mm, and the pores are angular (Gilbertson and Ryvarden 1987; Ginns and Lowe 1983). *Wolfiporia* can be isolated in pure culture from rotted tissue or when tuckahoes are incubated in a moist chamber.

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